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ABSTRACT

The background of the educational system in North Yemen is reviewed and some of the problems facing the system are described. The findings from examining documents and on-site visitations are summarized as follows: (1) the view is confirmed that developing countries with long history and cultural heritage are torn between keeping their traditions and moving towards modernization; (2) non-Yemeni educators, drawn from various nationalities, transplant their own systems in North Yemen which often conflict in view; (3) some Yemeni officials believe that establishing a center for research will immediately solve all their problems; (4) major educational problems include an extremely high percentage of dropouts in elementary education (about 80 percent), a lack of interpretation of data on a level that would be understood by the average official in the Ministry of Education, the need for indigenous teachers especially in the secondary schools, and the lack of local curriculum development rather than depending upon imported programs; and (5) there is hope for the future of education in North Yemen because the Ministry of Education realizes that there are problems and is willing to cooperate with researchers and educators from any place. (RL)

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EDUCATION IN NORTH YEMEN:

PROBLEMS AND HOPES

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INTRODUCTION

Yemen, an ancient country with wealth in history and traditions. The Red Sea to the west and the Indian Ocean to the south form Yemen's natural boundaries. For centuries it had been known for its relations with other countries due to its location. It had been a center for trade between Africia and Asia.

Within the past few hundred years, it became a closed and isolated country. Its rulers were dictators who suceeded in limiting its educational system to a few scattered elementary schools. On September 26, 1962 a revolution took place which resulted in the birth of a new Republic controlled by a Revolutionary Council. People discovered that they were living in isolation from the modern world and they wanted to move the country towards "modernization."

Sadly enough, after the revolution took place, the country was divided into two parts, South and North. A civil war took place. The war affected the two parts both economically and culturally. Economically: each side tried to deport the other, consequently depletion of economy took place. Culturally: both sides were exposed to outsiders who were sent to "help" in the war, and new values carried by those who went. The next result of the civil war was two separate governments with two different ideologies. Although Yemeni people would like to see the two parts back as one country, it does not look promising at the time of this writing. Of course, it would be in the best interest of the country if both sides could agree.

The Northern part of Yemen, known officially as the Arab Republic of Yemen, is the topic of this paper. The purpose of this paper is to present the background of the educational system in North Yemen, and to describe some of the problems facing the system as well as some of the hopes for the solution. This study has been done in two phases: the review and examination of available literature and on-site visitation.

PRESENT STATUS

The 1962 revolution felt its responsibility to bring Yemen out of the dark ages into the twentieth century as fast as possible. Leaders looked at education as one of the best means for advancement.

Typical and similar to other military revolutions, the ruling council built schools around the country without adequate planning and study. However, one should give credit to the Revolutionary Council for its effort and to the local communities who frequently participated in building the schools. Table 1 shows the increase in numbers of schools and students within 17 years.

TABLE 1

Comparison between 1961/1962 and 1978/1979 in Numbers of Schools and Students

Type of Schools	1961/1962		1978/1979	
	Schools	Students	Schools	Students
Elementary	909	61,335	1,711	251,967
Preparatory (J.H.)	4	735	135	18,852
Secondary (S.H.)	1	362	37	7,165
Elementary Teacher Training	1	172	14	830
Secondary Teacher Training	-	-	7	407

During the past six years, the Ministry of Education through UNESCO's effort has been re-building its administrative structure and has started some vocational schools.

With such expansion and the lack of qualified Yemeni teachers to carry on the mission, the only way to staff the schools was to "import" teachers, administrators and even programs. The only Arabic speaking country that could "export" teachers to Yemen was Egypt, especially those who taught at the preparatory (Junior High) or the secondary school level (Senior High).

Table 2 shows the numbers of teachers in each of the three levels: elementary, preparatory (Junior High) and secondary schools (Senior High).

TABLE 2

Yemeni and Non Yemeni Teachers (1979/1980)

	Elementary	Preparatory	Secondary
Yemeni	3,783	60	28
Non Yemeni	2,090	783	498

This means that Yemeni teachers form:

64.4% of elementary schools' teachers

7.3% of preparatory schools' teachers

5.3% of secondary schools' teachers

Prior to 1978, established schools beyond the elementary school level were academic and vocational educaton was neglected. In 1978/1979 the following schools started:

Three Preparatory Technical School with 801 students

One Secondary Technical School with 267 students

Five Secondary Commerce School with 350 students

In 1979/1980 a secondary agriculture school started with 55 students in the first year of the program.

In a country where trade and agriculture are the main source of economy, academic training is not attractive except for those who are planning to enter the civil service or those who can afford non-technical training. Another point to be considered is that technical schools usually require larger capital to equip them and the country, following the civil war, could not afford such expenses.

PROBLEMS

There was a sudden expansion in building schools, and influx of non-Yemeni teachers, administrators, UN projects personnel, and commercial companies. Scholarships were offered to Yemeni students to study in other countries. These students returned carrying new values and style of life. Such sudden exposure led people to have another look at their own way of life. Should they keep their culture that had lasted for centuries, or should they accept new values? To what degree can people change within one or two generations? These and many other questions need to be carefully addressed and examined.

Another problem is that non-Yemeni educators will continue for a good number of years to come. Since Yemen did not develop its goals of education, curriculum, or books, the country will depend on non-Yemeni

educators and educational systems and approaches to education. This in itself becomes a foreign element in the country.

One of the possible solutions to these problems was a proposal by the Ministry of Education to develop a center for research and development. When the center was proposed many officials had in mind that such a center will provide immediate solutions. The realization that research takes time may lead to frustration among Yemeni educators and thereby lead to further problems.

One of the striking phenomena is an extremely high percentage of drop-outs in elementary education. Tables 3 and 4* are modified from a study done by an official in the Ministry of Education.

TABLE 3

A longitudinal follow-up in number of boys (per thousand) for six years in elementary schools.

Grades	1973/74	1974/75	1975/76	1976/77	1977/78	1978/79
6th	266	323	300	226	175	192
5th	230	348	373	272	231	245
4th	379	553	487	481	404	319
3rd	536	650	718	593	571	392
2nd	615	760	856	782	676	813
1st	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
	1968/69	1969/70	1970/71	1971/72	1972/73	1973/74

*Please see the special note in the bibliography.

TABLE 4

A longitudinal follow-up in number of girls (per thousand) for six years in elementary schools.

Grades	1973/74	1974/75	1975/76	1976/77	1977/78	1978/79
6th	353	395	413	309	222	194
5th	363	450	441	340	240	331
4th	418	511	501	443	361	396
3rd	458	598	588	584	449	522
2nd	559	718	702	696	574	623
1st	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000	1000
	1968/69	1969/70	1970/71	1971/72	1972/73	1973/74

Analyzing the two tables* one find that there is a downward trend in the number of student's who finished grade 6, especially from 1976/77 to 1978/79. One can see that within six years more than 80 percent were dropouts. Not only will students return to illiteracy (especially those who dropout at an early age, i.e., 1st and 2nd grades), but also there is a tremendous waste in money spent on education. In a developing country like Yemen, one needs as many educated people as possible in order to help the society to improve.

*During the time of collecting data, many questions were not satisfactorily answered. Example: The total number of students in any given grade is available but not data about how many left or joined a grade in each school. Therefore one has to accept the total numbers. UNESCO has previously provided a consultant to help in collecting, classifying, and interpreting data. He left the project for about two years and the Ministry of Education and he was not replaced.

The investigator could not find sufficient reasons to explain the drop in number of students between 1st and 2nd and 3rd grades except that people could not see the relevance of the present system of education to their way of life.

There is great need for indiginous teachers (especially on the secondary school level) as well as a curriculum that reflects the culture of the country.

HOPES

The former discussion is not meant to present a hopeless case, rather it is to illustrate the need for a system of education that would help the country in its development.

Thinking of establishing a center for research, development and evaluation is in itself a good sign. Officials in the Ministry of Education feel that research is going to be a key in finding solutions. However, these officials must be reminded constantly that research is not a fast process and some findings may be painful. Another point is that the Ministry of Education is willing to cooperate with consultants provided by UNESCO. It is a challenging opportunity for researchers to step forward to help a developing country in its efforts to have its system of education.

SUMMARY

Not much has been published about the educational system in North Yemen. Most of the materials were found in UNESCO headquarters in Paris

in the form of studies and reports. Some of these reports are restricted in circulation. On one hand, this reflects the sensitivity of the authors to the situation; they did not want to make all their findings available to everyone lest it would be interpreted as criticism. On the other hand, this has the unfortunate result of denying full access to the documents to researchers.

In examining these documents there were some gaps which have been bridged through meetings and interviews with officials in the Ministry of Education, teachers and principals in Sana's,* the University of Sana's, UNESCO representative, and the Institute for Yemeni Studies. The researcher's fluency in the Arabic language immediately broke the barrier of communication and the interviewees became more open in answering the questions and frequently volunteered to give further information.

The findings of the study could be summarized as follows:

1. It confirms the view that developing countries with long history and cultural heritage are torn between keeping their traditions and moving towards modernization.
2. Relying on non-Yemeni educators will continue for awhile. Through sincere in their efforts, these educators transplant their own systems. Since educators are drawn from various nationalities, there are conflicts in views.

*It should be noted that due to some political tensions, the researcher was advised not to visit the other two big cities, i.e., Ta'iz and Hudaida. Data from those two cities as well as other towns were made available through the Ministry of Education.

3. Some Yemeni officials believe that establishing a center for research will immediately solve all the problems, Research, as well as development, is a slow process.
4. Major educational problems are manifested through:
   a. an extremely high percentage of dropouts in elementary education (about 80 percent)
   b. lack of interpretation of data on a level that would be understood by the average official in the Ministry of Education
   c. the need for indigenous teachers especially in the secondary schools
   d. the lack of local curriculum development rather than depending upon imported programs.
5. There is hope for the future of education in North Yemen because the Ministry of Education realizes that there are problems and it is willing to cooperate with researchers and educators from any place who are willing to help in the development of education the country.

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Special Note

There are two studies done by Mr. El-Komeem: One was published in a magazine Al-Ghad (The Tomorrow) in 1978 and the other memeographed pages. Both are in Arabic. He works for the Ministry of Education. The two studies contain plenty of useful information but they need reorganization. Tables 3 and 4 in this paper are taken from the 1980 study.